



How ants find their way



Ants are social insects who live in colonies that may include millions of individuals. The individuals work together for the survival of the colony.



Members of an ant colony belong to specialised groups, including queens, drones and workers. The workers gather most of the food, rear young and defend the colony. Many worker ants spend most of their time foraging to find food to support the colony.

When the lead workers first find food, they lay down a strong invisible chemical trail, called a pheromone trail. This allows other ants to follow the trail to the food source.

If ants are given the choice of two paths to the same food source they will gradually move towards using the shorter one. This chemical trail becomes stronger because more ants are following it than their fellow workers on the other trail. Finally the ants will switch to the stronger trail.

If an ant trail is disrupted, certain individuals will soon discover an alternative route. Pheromones are quickly laid and again the ants begin to follow the chemical trail.